

The Discourse of Usury: Relations Between Christians and Jews in the German Countryside, 1880–1914

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MOST historians are aware that the charge of usury belongs to the standard arsenal of both traditional anti-Judaism and modern forms of anti-Semitism (if indeed one accepts the validity of this distinction). More recently, historians and scholars of literature have considered the way in which usury was a powerful simile—the usurer as Jew—and as such central to the cultural history of learned and popular forms of anti-Semitic prejudice.¹ In the essay that follows, I do not intend to further document the history of this prejudice in the realm of print culture. Rather, I will explore the way in which its central assumption (namely that Jews and Christians possessed radically different and religiously specific conceptions of work and trade) configured, entered into, and also obfuscated rural relations between Christians and Jews. Here I choose my words carefully: “configured” because I want to show how outsiders perceived and narrated rural trading relations between Christians and Jews; “entered into” because the discourse of usury appealed to, made sense to, and mobilized some parts of the rural world more than others; and “obfuscated” because I hope to show that this discourse concealed a rich rural world, now lost, in which there were myriad divisions to be sure, in which there was deep anti-Semitism—yes, but where important points of commonality also existed, among them the relations of trade between Christians and Jews.

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1. Stefan Rohrbacher and Michael Schmidt, *Judenbilder: Kulturgeschichte antijüdischer Mythen und antisemitischer Vorurteile* (Hamburg, 1991), 90.

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I

Hans Rosenberg, the historian who pioneered a structural approach to understanding anti-Semitism in Central Europe, argued that the resurgence of usury as a problem of rural relations occurred in the context of the Great Depression of 1873–1896, which led to a discrepancy between the long-term downward trend in the profit of agricultural produce and the steady and even upward trend of agricultural trade.² Because Jews disproportionately drew their wealth from trade and Christians from farming, Rosenberg counted the agricultural depression as one of the “rational” causes of anti-Semitism in the countryside. Yet the fact of a depression (which historians now see as a series of economic cycles with highly divergent regional valences) and its resulting inequities cannot alone count for a heightened anti-Semitism.³ For behind the fluctuations in price and profit a complex web of social relations existed, serving to mediate issues of power, expropriation, status, and the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of certain economic practices.⁴ Rural economies did not just weather the depression of 1873 to 1896, they worked out, however problematically, social relations in the face of it.

It is in this context that ideology became important, less as a reflection of the real than as a specific narration of relationships.⁵ In this narration, the discourse of usury was of decisive moment, for by dint of a demagogic appeal to the idea of radical otherness, it helped establish and solidify a binary language of work and trade: on the one side Jews who did not really work, who had no sense of fair dealing, and who were ruinous to the rural economy; on the other peasants who worked hard in the field, who earned their bread by the sweat of their brows, and who, simple and honest, were easily deceived.

2. Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit* (Berlin, 1967), 99. For an astute use of the “Great Depression” as a heuristic device for understanding the emergence of anti-Semitism among the members of one social group, see Shulamit Volkov, *The Rise of Popular Antimodernism in Germany: The Urban Master Artisans, 1873–1896* (Princeton, 1978).

3. See James Retallack, *Germany in the Age of Kaiser Wilhelm II* (New York and London, 1996), 20–21. For a more detailed account of the “Great Depression,” as well as for further literature, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 3 (Munich, 1995), 547–95. For critical accounts of the way Rosenberg linked the “Great Depression” to anti-Semitism, see especially Geoff Eley, “Hans Rosenberg and the Great Depression of 1873–1896: Politics and Economics in Recent German Historiography, 1960–1980,” in Eley, *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past* (Boston, 1986), 28–50; and, more recently, James F. Harris, *The People Speak! Anti-Semitism and Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Bavaria* (Ann Arbor, 1994), 220–21.

4. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1966), 205. For the German context, see Eley, “Hans Rosenberg and the Great Depression of 1873–1896,” 32–33.

5. In recent studies of German anti-Semitism, the relative autonomy of ideology has come to assume a more central role, eclipsing older approaches that emphasized the determining function of socioeconomic factors. For an astute review of this new literature, see Till van Rahden, “Ideologie und Gewalt: Neuerscheinungen über den Antisemitismus in der deutschen Geschichte des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 49 (1996): 11–29. For a broader introduction to the current debate about the relation of structure to political ideology and action (especially as this debate is understood in Germany), see Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp, eds., *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Munich, 1997).

The dichotomies of this discourse possessed deep historical roots and counted among the most tenacious beliefs of peasants and townsmen (Protestant and Catholic) who harbored anti-Semitic resentment.⁶ A sense of it can be gleaned from a passage reprinted by Alban Stolz in his *Armut und Geldsachen* (Poverty and Money Matters), an immensely popular almanac widely read by Catholics in southwest Germany.

They (the Jews) have never created something necessary, good, useful, pleasing. Yet they still became rich, infinitely richer than the Christians, and what the Christians worked for, saved for, sweated for, and laboriously eked out from the earth, that is what many Jews used to enrich themselves.⁷

This I take to be the core of the dichotomy of work and trade that informed anti-Semitic thinking. It was based on the idea that the work of one is per definition exploited by the other; that work in the field and on the farm constitutes authentic work and creates genuine value, but that money lending and trade, especially when interest is involved, do not.

The specific stigma of usury (and of the usurious Jew) accepted this polarization and criminalized trade or lending with interest or collection practices outside of a certain, not precisely defined, norm. Thus, according to the usury law of 1880, the courts were able to sentence usurers if it could be shown that their practices constituted willful "exploitation of the distressed condition, thoughtlessness or inexperience of another."⁸ The law, however, desisted from establishing a concrete ceiling on the amount of interest that could be charged or even in spelling out the specific practices that counted as excessively exploitative. Prosecution therefore depended, to some extent, on the *sensus communis* of what counted as fair.⁹

The wider published discourse on usury, insofar as it was not a juridical discourse, often moved in the language of anti-Semitism and of modernization: anti-Semitism because authors typically saw Jews as quintessential usurers; modernization because they typically plotted the relationship between rural Jewish cattle traders and moneylenders on the one side, Christian peasants on the other, as both ruinous and backward. Partly the problem concerned the structure of the rural economy, partly the alleged simplicity of the peasant mind.

6. Jews as usurers counted among the most frequent topoi in the petitions of rural Bavarians opposed to Jewish emancipation. See Harris, *The People Speak!*, 133, 217.

7. Alban Stolz, *Armut und Geldsachen: Kalender für Zeit und Ewigkeit 1874*, 7th ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1908), 27, and, more generally, 25–48. Stolz reprinted long excerpts from Jean Müller, "Hilfsbüchlein gegen viele Wucherjuden und etwelche Wucherschriften (1852). On Müller, an Alsatian writer, see Alfred Wahl, *Confessions et comportement dans les campagnes d'Alsace et de Bade, 1871–1939*, 2 vols. (Metz, 1980), 2: 846–52.

8. For the drafts of the bill, see *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des deutschen Reichstages*, 4te Legislationsperiode, III. Session, 1880, Band 3, Anlagen, pp. 371–401; Band 4, Anlagen, pp. 783–69.

9. This became especially evident in the debate on the Reichstag floor. See *ibid.*, Band 1, pp. 555–77; Band 2, 827–55, 1212–33.

In his *Die Pfälzer: Ein Rheinisches Volksbild*, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl described the "severe peasant narrow-mindedness" that drove these people into the arms of Jewish lenders. "Despite all attempts at enlightenment," Riehl complained, "Hans continues to do the same as Kunz always did."¹⁰ Riehl considered this particular aspect of traditional rural relations disturbing, precisely because in his mind it threatened an idyllic vision of yeoman farmers embodying German virtue.¹¹ For Riehl, to modernize meant to preserve the essence of this vision, and, in practice, it entailed the denial that Jewish traders constituted a legitimate and integral part of the rural world.

This modernizing discourse was also central to the essays published in 1887 by the Verein für Sozialpolitik (Association for Social Policy) and collectively entitled *Der Wucher auf dem Lande* (Usury in the Countryside). Together with an earlier association publication entitled *Bäuerliche Zustände* (Rural Conditions), *Der Wucher auf dem Lande* constituted the most important study of rural usury published in the Second Empire.¹² In both studies, the Verein commissioned reports for each Prussian province and each separate state in Germany. The authors commissioned represented a wide occupational range, including ten civil servants, seven agricultural experts, seven representatives of farmer's associations, four politicians, two pastors, two estate owners, a lawyer, a teacher, and thirteen authors with no or unclear occupational designation. In terms of political parties, the writers included Conservatives, National Liberals, and at least one member of the Catholic Center.¹³

Despite the diversity of the contributors, common themes emerged from their reports. With few exceptions, the authors writing for the Verein cavalierly confused Jews with usurers: some authors did so quite deliberately, others advanced disclaimers that usury did not respect confessional borders while slipping into the prejudice nevertheless. Most authors agreed that the solution was to reduce the dependence of rural Christian peasants on rural Jewish traders, thereby making the latter superfluous. To this end, they encouraged banks to extend small personal loans and pushed peasant associations to set up credit cooperatives. Yet this was a slow process, since lending to peasants with irregular incomes involved considerable risk. Moreover, peasants often missed payments, thus making flexibility a matter of paramount importance to the workings of the rural economy.¹⁴

10. Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Die Pfälzer: Ein rheinisches Volksbild* (Stuttgart and Augsburg, 1857), 356.

11. On Riehl, see Joan Campbell, *Joy in Work, German Work: The National Debate* (Princeton, 1989), 34–46.

12. *Der Wucher auf dem Lande: Schriften des Vereins für Sozialpolitik*, vol. 35 (Leipzig, 1887); *Bäuerliche Zustände: Schriften des Vereins für Sozialpolitik*, vol. 22 (Leipzig, 1883).

13. See table of contents and chapter headings for *Der Wucher auf dem Lande* and *Bäuerliche Zustände*.

14. David Peal, "Anti-Semitism and Rural Transformation in Kurhessen: The Rise and Fall of the Böckel Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1985), 95–98.

The problem of flexible credit seemed most severe in southern and western Germany, where small plots of land resulting from generations of partible inheritance constituted the norm. As the Social Democrat Eduard David discovered for the Grand Duchy of Hesse, not the independent farmer but the land-hungry villager most often fell into severe debt. Typically, the poor villager's plot was too small to eke out an independent existence, and typically his debts constituted a greater part of his net worth. For their part, Jewish traders, especially cattle traders, extended credit to independent farmers as well as to poor villagers, sometimes in cash, sometimes in goods. Often ashamed of their need to borrow, rural Christians could in this way circumvent state lending agencies, which were less flexible and less discrete about peasant debts. Instead, peasants could deal privately with Jews whom they often knew.¹⁵ As one author writing for the Association for Social Policy lamented, "the peasant soon refuses to conduct any business without his court Jew."¹⁶

From the standpoint of the authors writing for the association, this was precisely the problem: rural Jews, they believed, exploited a relationship of familiarity and trust. According to the author writing about the Grand Duchy of Hesse, the Jews knew "better than the peasant himself" when the peasant was short on fodder for his cattle, when he needed extra money, when he felt outdone by his prosperous neighbor, and when his wife wanted new clothes, and his children gifts.¹⁷ In this way, Jews could manipulate Christian peasants, catch them unaware, and ensnare them in a web of dependency. "The hunter is the Jew," the Hessian author concluded, "the Jews are the bush beaters, and the peasants are the wild game."¹⁸

This was an academic discourse that appealed to a rhetoric of what was natural (peasants) and unnatural (Jews), what belonged in the countryside (hard work) and what was alien to the rural landscape (money lending). It constructed an imaginary harmony, into which Jews could only bring dissonance. And it created an image of the countryside in which there was no place for Jews.

The anti-Semitic agitation of the 1880s and 1890s politicized this discourse, in some areas—such as the Grand Duchy of Hesse, the Electorate of Hesse, Franconia, the Palatinate, and the Kraichgau in Baden—with a great deal of success.¹⁹ How then did this modernizing discourse successfully "enter into" the

15. Ibid., 95–96.

16. *Bäuerliche Zustände*, 2:4.

17. *Der Wucher auf dem Lande*, 77. Similarly, *Bäuerliche Zustände*, 133.

18. *Der Wucher auf dem Lande*, 77. The general thesis of manipulation could be found in French language treatises as well. Writing in 1882, Charles Perrot opined that "the usurers totally abuse the misery and the ignorance of the peasant in the service of their fraudulent manipulations . . ." Cited in Wahl, *Confession et comportement*, 2:547.

19. For a thoughtful essay on the current state of the research on anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century Germany, see Till van Rahden, "Ideologie und Gewalt," 11–29. For a recent overview, see Steven M. Lowenstein, Paul Mendes-Flohr, Peter Pulzer, and Monika Richarz, *Integration in Dispute 1871–1918*, vol. 3 of *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, ed. Michael A. Meyer (New York, 1997), esp. 196–251.

rural world? Did it merely reflect the deeply held prejudices of land-owning peasant farmers? This is a complex matter. But in order to understand the concrete appeal and organizational trajectory of this discourse, as well as its place in anti-Semitic movements, it may be useful to direct our focus to villages and towns where it actually took root. Here the town of Bretten (Baden) and its surrounding villages may serve as a case study, for in Bretten (pop. 4,781 in 1900) the rise of political anti-Semitism was predicated on a demagogic appeal shaped by the discourse of usury and directed in large measure at local Jewish cattle traders who were said to have exploited the area's peasants at a time when many of the peasants' cattle suffered from hoof and mouth disease.

The anti-Semitic agitation, which began in January 1892, did not start spontaneously among the peasantry; rather, it was organized from the outside, by Viktor Welcker, a hack journalist who had hitherto run a largely unsuccessful anti-Semitic newspaper in the city of Ulm. Welcker organized a meeting of the anti-Semitic Deutsch-Soziale Verein (German Social Association), which was attended by a large crowd consisting mainly of young railway workers, local craftsmen, petty officials, and small merchants, but not peasants.²⁰ As in many of the meetings he would organize over the next six months, Welcker castigated the Jews for their unfair business tactics and for their exploitation of the peasantry—in short, for their alleged usurious practices, which Welcker maintained could only be countered if Christians heeded the call: "Don't buy from the Jews."²¹ The appeal—demagogic—was nevertheless successful in poisoning local relations: Jews were abused on the streets of Bretten; Christians yelled "hepp hepp"; some smashed the windows of Jewish houses; a rural synagogue was desecrated; and a number of Jews were viciously beaten.

The Jews of Bretten and the outlying countryside reacted with "passive resistance," taking the initiative and themselves boycotting the cattle market "almost without exception."²² As the leaders of the Jewish community in Bretten argued: "No one can take offense when the Jewish cattle traders do not want to risk bringing their business to a town in which penny pamphlets and newspapers warn against the Jews and urge not to do business with them."²³ As a result of the boycott, the amount of cattle at the market in Bretten declined precipitously, falling from 1,100 to 200 head within two months.²⁴

There can be no doubt that the clash over the cattle market combined with

20. For more detail on the case of Bretten, see Helmut Walser Smith, "Alltag und Antisemitismus in Baden, 1890–1900," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 141 (1993): 290–94.

21. See, for details, Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe (hereafter GLA) 357/10035 Bitte der Vertretung der israelitischen Gemeinde Bretten um Massregeln gegen die Übergriffe des Antisemitismus.

22. *Brettener Wochenblatt*, n.d. press clipping, 11 January 1892 (Offener Sprechsaal, letter "Im Namen der Israeliten in Bretten."); GLA 357/10035.

23. Ibid.

24. Smith, "Alltag und Antisemitismus in Baden," 291.

Welcker's tireless agitation created a situation of considerable divisiveness. But here my aim is less to analyze the social dynamics of this division, which resulted in 55.3 percent of voters in Bretten supporting an anti-Semitic candidate in the Reichstag election of 1893, than to reconstruct its discursive parameters. By focusing on letters to the editor of the local newspaper, the *Brettener Wochenblatt*, it is possible to reconstruct these parameters and thus suggest something of the way rural and small town relations between Christians and Jews were mediated.²⁵

They were mediated, I would argue, in a language that focused on community and on the boundaries of legitimate business. With few exceptions, the Christian citizens of Bretten considered the boycott of the cattle market by Jewish traders irresponsible and damaging to the community. Thus one man, the owner of a small factory, publicly declared that the Jews who boycotted the cattle market "consciously harmed the city and district of Bretten," leaving him no choice but "to break off my business relationships with the local Jews."²⁶ His sentiment, namely that the Jews bore principal responsibility for local animosities, was neither isolated nor confined to the considerable number of Bretten's citizens who supported Welcker's anti-Semitic movement. In some measure, it was also shared by those who distanced themselves from this movement, as did one man, writing in the *Brettener Wochenblatt* "in the name of many," who argued that the local citizens would "welcome the previous mutual peaceful accord," but believed that this accord could only be resumed if the Jews terminated this boycott and "attempted in the most loyal way to compromise."²⁷

But there were also contrary voices, and these voices argued—precisely—that the Jewish cattle traders were important to the local economy, and that the aspersions cast against them, in particular concerning usurious practices, were false. In his letter to the *Brettener Wochenblatt*, Bernard Scheifele urged the authorities to step in and dissolve the anti-Semitic meetings, which he saw as the root of the problem. "It is not as if, as they say, we do not need any Jews," and, contrary to anti-Semitic assertions, "we have nothing to complain about in Bretten; here they have also contributed to the improvement of the town."²⁸ Similarly, one farmer from Zaisenhausen, allegedly exploited by usurious cattle traders from Flehingen, insisted that the anti-Semitic accusations were false. "In the name of truth which one owes to the Jews of Flehingen as well," he wrote that he had done business with a Jewish cattle trader from Flehingen for many years—"to my continual satisfaction." Moreover, far from knowingly selling him (the farmer) a sick cow, the Jewish trader had gone out of his way to bring

25. The *Brettener Sonntagsblatt* was a conservative *Anzeiger*, but as the only newspaper in town, it received letters from both sides. Moreover, because it was an official paper (supported by the government of Baden), it had an obligation to be impartial in the publication of these letters.

26. *Brettener Wochenblatt*, 11 January 1892, GLA 357/10035.

27. *Ibid.*, 12 January 1892.

28. *Ibid.*, 9 March 1892.

the cow back to the original seller who had claimed the cow healthy when it was not.²⁹

Perhaps these were voices in the wind, but they suggest something of the parameters of a rural and small town discourse that focused on community and on the legitimacy of trading practices. The anti-Semites also focused on community and the legitimacy of trade, but primarily in order to reenforce the idea that Jews and Christians represented diametrically opposed systems of value. Welcker, for example, distributed a list from the Grand Duchy of Hesse, which contained the names of 71 Jewish usurers and 99 of their victims, "Hesse peasants who were driven from the property of their fathers."³⁰ The list was replete with untruths: some of the so-called usurers were listed twice, others were actually Christians, some of the cases never occurred, and most did not occur in the way the list asserted.³¹ But how were Christian villagers in the Kraichgau in Baden to know this, even if they wanted to? Moreover, this particular kind of agitation exploited fear, which, given the current economic depression, was not groundless, and a prejudice, which, whatever one may think of it, harbored a kernel of truth.

Here I use this phrase, "kernel of truth," in a very specific way. The medieval historian Gavin Langmuir has suggested that in our efforts to understand the way anti-Semitism works it is useful to distinguish between chimerical assertions, which constitute imaginary images about a people that are completely fictitious ("mental processes unconnected with real people of the outgroup") and xenophobic assertions, which may on occasion be corroborated by experience.³² The charge of ritual murder belongs to the category of chimerical, usury to the category of xenophobic assertion. Based on the fact that usury occurred, and that some usurers were Jews, the anti-Semites encouraged the xenophobic assertion that usury was a specifically Jewish crime. And there is considerable evidence to suggest, precisely because there was a "kernel of truth," that peasants shared this xenophobic assertion, equating Jews and usurers.

Partly, one suspects, the sheer presence of Jews in the rural cattle trading economy reenforced the connection. In the second half of the nineteenth century, most cattle traders were Jews, though the proportion of Jews to Christians in this occupation differed from region to region and, in all probability, changed over time. In 1852, in four districts of Hesse-Kassel, there were one hundred and forty Jewish cattle traders and seventeen Christian dealers. Moreover, Jews seemed to possess a near monopoly in many parts of southern and western

29. Ibid., 2 January 1892.

30. Flugblatt no. 36 Deutsch-Soziale Partei (Güterschlächter Liste), 1890. GLA 60/681.

31. See, for an examination of the list, *Antisemitenspiegel: Die Antisemiten im Lichte des Christentums, des Rechtes und der Wissenschaft* (Danzig, 1900), 157-64.

32. Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990), 334.

Germany, including the Duchy of Hesse, Baden, Württemberg, the Palatinate, the Rhineland, Westphalia, and Hanover.³³ Given the high migration rate of village Jews to the cities in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, and the proliferation of state-supported lending agencies, one may assume that over the course of the Kaiserreich both the number of Jews in this occupation declined as well as the proportion of Jews to non-Jews. Thus by 1917 the chairman of the association of cattle traders in Germany counted 40,000 independent cattle traders, only 25,000 of whom were Jewish.³⁴

But with respect to usurious practices, Jews proved less distinguished. After the Reichstag passed anti-usury laws in 1880, the Reich statistical bureau published figures that made it evident that Jews comprised only a minority of those found guilty of usury. For the eighties and early nineties, the following pattern of conviction emerged.

Year	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890	1891	1892
Christ.	77	77	49	27	39	28	28	37	17	37	31
Jews	21	16	12	10	3	8	8	4	5	7	6

Source: Comité zur Abwehr antisemitischer Angriffe, *Die Juden in Deutschland*, vol. 1, *Die Kriminalität der Juden in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1896), 24.

For a slightly later period, for which statistics were also extant, the pattern (shown below in average convictions per year) was essentially the same.

Years	1899–1902	1903–1906	1907–1908	1909–1910
Christians	24	17	27.5	21
Jews	3	5	3.5	2

Source: *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik des Judentums* 1, no. 1 (January, 1905); 7; 5, no. 4 (April, 1909); 9, no. 6 (June, 1913): 96.

Proportions in predominantly agricultural states further reflected this pattern. In Bavaria in 1881, to take one example, seven people were found guilty of usury: six Catholics, one Protestant, and no Jews.³⁵ These statistics suggest that usury was an important problem in the early eighties, but declined thereafter; it declined absolutely, and the proportion of Jews to Christians indicted declined as well. Throughout these two periods, most people convicted of usury were not

33. Richarz, "Emancipation and Continuity," in *Revolution and Evolution, 1848 in German-Jewish History*, ed. Werner Mosse, Arnold Pauker and Reinhard Rürup (Tübingen, 1981), 113.

34. Richarz, "Emancipation and Continuity," 106.

35. *Der Wucher auf dem Lande*, 108, n. 1. For Alsace-Lorraine, see Vicki Caron, *Between France and Germany: The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine 1871–1918* (Stanford, 1988), 125, 229, n. 30.

Jewish. But, especially in the early eighties, the percentage of Jews indicted was higher than their relative percentage in the population, though not than their relative participation in the rural trading and money-lending economy. It is also true that the vast majority of usury cases or instances of unfair business practices probably never made it to court, and still fewer ended in convictions.³⁶ Still, there is no reason to assume that those that did concerned people with a religious composition different from those that did not.

The success of xenophobic assertions—"Jews are usurers"—does not, however, depend on the veracity, or even on the degree of veracity, of the assertion being made. Instead, it is important that the assertion resonate in collective memory, and this, in the 1890s, is what the anti-Semitic agitators were able to reach, especially in the countryside. Partly, that collective memory had already been shaped by earlier spurts of anti-Semitic propaganda, particularly in the late seventies and early eighties, when the "Great Depression" hit hardest, and anti-Semitic slogans became an increasingly prominent part of political discourse.³⁷ Partly, however, that collective memory was shaped by events closer to home. According to the district magistrate of Bretten (himself not free of anti-Semitism), the anti-Semitic movement flourished in the countryside because of lingering public anger (manifested in "rural disturbances") in the wake of two usury trials, one of which focused on the unfair business practices and peasant expropriations of the Jewish cattle trader Hirsch Hausmann of Flehingen.³⁸ Although it is now impossible to establish the veracity of the charges made (Hausmann was sentenced to six years imprisonment), it may be of interest to reconstruct the rural context in which the case resonated. A confessionally mixed village in the Kraichgau, Flehingen was made up of a Protestant majority, a Catholic minority, and a still smaller Jewish population. Among the Christians who were allegedly sacrificed to Hausmann's business practices (none of whom actually lived in Flehingen), only four were peasants who tilled their own land; the rest were artisans and members of the rural underclass: two day laborers, two basket makers, a cobbler, a cabinet maker, a tailor, a cigar maker, a weaver, a saddle maker, and a wood cutter.³⁹ In this sense, the case was not atypical. In his close examination of debts and foreclosures in the Electorate of Hesse, David Peal has shown that the outstanding debts owed to the Bachrach family (Jewish traders and moneylenders in Neustadt) revealed a similar composition: of nineteen persons only three were farmers, the rest artisans, workers, day laborers, and widows.⁴⁰

36. Peal, *Anti-Semitism and Rural Transformation*, 101, cites roughly twice as many suits as convictions. In Bavaria the rate of conviction may have been higher. Between 1881 and 1884, 75 cases were brought to court, 51 of which resulted in convictions. See *Der Wucher auf dem Lande*, 108.

37. Peal, "Anti-Semitism and Rural Transformation in Kurhessen," 99–103.

38. BA Bretten, 15 January 1892. GLA 236/7241, 136–41.

39. Heinrich Diesbach, ed., *Prozess gegen den jüdischen Wucherer Hirsch Hausmann von Flehingen* (Mannheim, 1884).

40. Peal, "Anti-Semitism and Rural Transformation," 107. For a very similar pattern for an

The sociological distinction is important, for the discourse of usury pitted independent hard-working Christian peasants or farmers against unscrupulous Jewish moneylenders whose work ethic was of a different stripe. The real problem, however, was the chronic indebtedness of impoverished and often landless artisans and laborers: in short, the rural and small-town underclass. And it is these people, as David Peal has convincingly shown in the case of the Electorate of Hesse, who supported the anti-Semitic movement at the election.⁴¹ Similarly, in the Kraichgau, the anti-Semitic movement succeeded first in the towns, and primarily among railroad workers, poor artisans, and petty officials; it then spread to the countryside, especially to those parts that were unorganized; and, in the main, that meant to the Protestant, not the Catholic countryside.⁴² This does not mean that Protestant peasants with land did not share in the conviction that Jews engaged in usurious practices; nor does it imply that Catholic peasants thought differently about this than Protestant peasants. On the contrary.⁴³ But it does suggest that the political instrumentalization of a discourse that depended on a dichotomy of hard working peasants and usurious Jews found political resonance for reasons largely unconnected with the actual experience of independent Christian farmers who dealt with Jewish traders.

II

Who were the Jewish traders, and in particular the cattle traders who occupied the angry imagination of anti-Semitic agitators? What was the position of these traders in the rural Jewish community? And how did this community perceive the problem of usury? Did the discourse of usury reflect, as a number of historians and ethnologists have argued, differing conceptions of legitimate work and trade: Jewish and market oriented on one side of the religious divide, Christian and precapitalist on the other.⁴⁴ I wish, instead, to argue the reverse: that this

earlier period (1817 to 1819), see Robert von Friedeburg, *Ländliche Gesellschaft und Obrigkeit: Gemeindeprotest und politische Mobilisierung im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1997), 182.

41. Peal, "Anti-Semitism and Rural Transformation in Kurhessen," 233–34, 256–57.

42. See Smith, "Alltag und Antisemitismus in Baden," where the argument concerning the relation of town to country in anti-Semitic organizing is pursued in greater detail. On the confessional dimension of anti-Semitic electioneering in Baden, see Helmut Walser Smith, "Religion and Conflict: Protestants, Catholics, and Anti-Semitism in the State of Baden in the Era of Wilhelm II," *Central European History* 27, no. 3 (1994): 283–314. For a perceptive discussion of the way in which in an earlier period, anti-Semitism became enmeshed in confessional polemics, see Dagmar Herzog, *Intimacy and Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden* (Princeton, 1996), esp. 53–84.

43. On the similarities and differences of Catholic and Protestant anti-Semitism, see now Olaf Blaschke, *Katholizismus und Antisemitismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Göttingen, 1997), esp. 172–82. See also Helmut Walser Smith, "The Learned and the Popular Discourse of Anti-Semitism in the Catholic Milieu of the Kaiserreich," *Central European History* 27, no. 3 (1994): 315–29.

44. The assumption is most commonly embedded in studies of prejudice, which, by dint of their approach, emphasize difference and overlook commonality. In historical studies, a recent example is Olaf Blaschke, "Antikapitalismus und Antisemitismus: Die Wirtschaftsmentalität der Katholiken im

discourse obscured more than it revealed, and in particular that it obscured deep commonalities between Christian peasants and Jewish traders, commonalities that concerned life, work, and value in the German countryside. Here one must measure words. The argument is not that difference did not exist; that animosity did not exist; that discrimination and violence did not exist. Rather, the argument is that everyday relationships were also marked by other dimensions: community ties (as well as antagonisms), a language more common than anti-Semitic agitators allowed, and the importance—central to any personal business relationship—of trust.

Due largely to the exacting research of Monika Richarz, who has done more than any other historian to reconstruct the world of Germany's rural Jews, historians now know a great deal about Jewish cattle traders, especially in southwest Germany, where in the mid-nineteenth century Jews possessed a near monopoly.⁴⁵

Jewish cattle traders tended to be richer than the local peasantry, poorer than the urban middle class. In his unpublished memoirs, Salomon Andorn tells how his father, a cattle trader in the Grand Duchy of Hesse, "could hardly live on the meager earnings" of cattle trading and was forced, "despite all troubles and efforts," to grow his own grain, potatoes, and vegetables as well as to supplement his income from cattle trading with income from selling other articles, such as wool, hats, flax, horsehair, and honeycombs.⁴⁶ Social stratification also marked the world of rural Jewish cattle traders. In Salomon Andorn's village, Gemünden-on-the-Wohr, there were twenty-one Jewish families, of which one was considered to be very rich, "four to five of relative prosperity, some with small holdings, the others with only tiny pieces of property."⁴⁷ Language, and in particular local dialects, reflected this stratification. Cattle traders too poor to buy their own cows and who therefore served only as brokers were termed *schmoozer*—a derogatory word for those "who through crafty or deceitful talk make profit."⁴⁸

Wilhelminischen Deutschland," in *Shylock? Zinsverbot und Geldverleih in der jüdischen und christlichen Tradition*, ed. Johannes Heil and Bernd Wacker (Munich, 1996), 114–46.

45. See Monika Richarz, "Emancipation and Continuity, German Jews in the Rural Economy," 95–115; Richarz, "Viehhandel und Landjuden im 19. Jahrhundert: Eine symbiotische Wirtschaftsbeziehung in Südwestdeutschland," *Menora, Jahrbuch für deutsch-jüdische Geschichte* 1 (Munich, 1990): 66–88; Richarz, "Die soziale Stellung der jüdischen Händler auf dem Lande am Beispiel Südwestdeutschlands," in *Jüdische Unternehmer in Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Werner E. Mosse and Hans Pohl (Stuttgart, 1992). For introductions to the historiography of Jews in the countryside, see Monika Richarz, "Die Entdeckung der Landjuden: Stand und Probleme ihrer Erforschung am Beispiel Südwestdeutschlands," in *Landjudentum im Südwestdeutschen- und Bodenseeraum*, ed. Vorarlberg Landesarchiv (Dornbirn, Austria, 1992); Trude Maurer, *Die Entwicklung der jüdischen Minderheit in Deutschland (1780–1933)*, 4th special issue, *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* (Tübingen, 1992), 70–85.

46. Unpublished manuscript in the Leo Baeck Institute (hereafter LBI) in New York. Salomon Andorn, "Wie es in unserer kleinen Welt einst war," 21.

47. Ibid.

48. This definition is from Werner Weinberg, *Die Reste des Jüdischdeutschen* (Stuttgart, 1969), 99.

For most cattle traders, hardship and long hours defined daily existence. For the father of Julius Frank, a cattle trader in Steinach on the Saale in the Franconian part of Bavaria, this typically meant rising at three o'clock in the morning for a sojourn in a village not his own. Long treks with their cattle often kept traders away from their villages and families for a week, yet in this week they usually remained observant, keeping kosher laws (with bread and cold meats, coffee and fruit that they carried with them), laying tefillin, and living a "Spartan lifestyle" on the road. The road, or the territory that defined the cattle traders area of work (his *Medina*), as well as the families with whom he traded, had in many cases been delineated generations ago.⁴⁹ Consequently rural Jews defended these territorial arrangements tenaciously: "Never," Jacob Picard of the village of Wangen on Lake Constance recalled, "did they encroach upon each other's territory."⁵⁰ This situation allowed cattle traders to enjoy monopolies in certain villages, but it also meant that business between Jews and Christians was conducted by people who knew each other, and, in some cases, whose fathers had known each other as well. To the Christian peasant ashamed of his borrowing and the Jewish cattle trader who risked the extension of credit, the ensuing trust was of paramount importance. As Picard remembered of Jews in his village: "Throughout the seasons they made their rounds through the familiar countryside, buying and selling cattle on the farms where the owners were well known to them and with whom they had been friends, from father to son."⁵¹

Here the image, drawn from personal memoirs, which in turn rely on childhood memories, may suggest a picture of the rural world more idyllic than real. This is especially true since the memoirs were written after 1945, in most cases either in the United States or in Israel.⁵² In this sense, the memoirs are hardly a window onto a lost world. Yet they do provide clues to specific events and specific ways of talking, which in some cases can be corroborated by contemporaneous sources. Moreover, I want to stress that despite their bias they present a more believable image of rural business relationships than the modernizing discourse of folklorists like Riehl or like that of the authors of the *Archiv für Sozialpolitik*, who assumed the personal relations between cattle dealer and peasant to be an all too obvious example of cunning, intelligent Jews manipulating poorer, less educated, more primitive peasants.

The manipulation thesis that the modernizers advanced did injustice to the complexity of rural market relations as well as to the sophistication of the actors involved. Peasants were neither so backward nor cattle traders so cunning that

49. Hermann Schwab, *Jewish Rural Communities in Germany* (London, 1955), 34–37.

50. Jacob Picard, "Childhood in the Village: Fragments of an Autobiography," in: *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 4 (1959): 277–78.

51. Picard, "Childhood in the Village," 277–78.

52. Monika Richarz, ed. *Jüdisches Leben im Deutschland*, vol. 2, *Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte im Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart, 1979), 7–9.

simple manipulation easily explains the quality of their business relations.⁵³ For friendship (to be sure qualified), favors (usually with a price), informality and hospitality also marked business relations and served not only as facilitators of rural dealing, but also as market constraints on cattle traders and peasants. Fritz Frank, who lived in the village of Horb in Württemberg, believed that sometimes cattle trading and money lending made for "bad blood" but that friendship, honor, and trust between cattle trader and peasant countervailed this potential animosity. The villages he knew tended to be "free of anti-Semitism" because "everyone knew each other, and the peasant only went to someone he could trust."⁵⁴ Moreover, as Salomon Andorn remembered, "one would not forsake a reputation for honesty in trade, and the ability to be on familiar terms (auf du) for a one-time profit."⁵⁵ Here the point is not that these reflections constitute an incisive analysis of Christian attitudes toward Jews. They do not. There was less anti-Semitism in Horb because anti-Semitic agitators never successfully organized in the rural parts of Württemberg, whereas in the nearby Kraichgau in Baden the story was very different. Yet these memoirs do tell us about the way business was transacted, and suggest that while cattle traders were no doubt manipulative and peasants full of prejudice, the general picture of Jewish cattle traders manipulating unthinking peasants is overdrawn.

And it is overdrawn because it underestimates the degree to which Jewish cattle traders were enmeshed, for good or for ill, in the values of a rural economy. In fact, in their memoirs the sons and daughters of cattle traders typically decry the business backwardness of their fathers. Salomon Andorn wrote that "my father . . . remained a cattle dealer because he lacked capital and boldness."⁵⁶ Julius Frank complained of a similar lack of entrepreneurial spirit in his father, a cattle trader in Steinach, Bavaria. "Father was not a shrewd businessman. He never had a real business training. And he was too kindhearted. Peasants generally paid him in three yearly installments. If they failed to pay him on time he easily agreed to a postponement."⁵⁷ Like Andorn, who lived in the village of Gemünden-on-the-Wohr in Hesse, Frank was tied to the outlook of his rural world, and, like the peasants around him, his economic thinking was backward, his business stagnant. Moreover, the outlook of such traders was often itself anti-urban, and in religious terms increasingly orthodox.⁵⁸ It should

53. Indeed, research in the 1980s on the German peasantry suggested that the picture of economically backward peasants, outlined with especially sharp contours by Alexander Gerschenkron, was overdrawn. See, for an introduction to this research, Robert G. Moeller, ed. *Peasants and Lords in Modern Germany: Recent Studies in Agricultural History* (Boston, 1986), 10–11. For a more recent study that emphasizes the continuity of agrarian mentalities at the level of rural community, see Robert von Friedeburg, *Ländliche Gesellschaft und Obrigkeit*.

54. LBI Unpublished Manuscript. Fritz Frank, "Verschollene Heimat," 42.

55. Andorn, "Wie es in unserer kleinen Welt einst war," 1.

56. Ibid.

57. LBI Unpublished Manuscript. Julius Frank, "Reminiscences of Days Gone by," 18. For a partial translation, see Richarz, ed. *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland*, 2:196.

58. With respect to religion, Steven Lowenstein argues that "the tendency of rural communities

not surprise, then, that village Jews tended to romanticize pastoral harmony. Nathan Marx, a cattle trader, wrote to his son that he preferred the rural life of south Germany to the cities of the north, where "everything is determined by classes, professions, origin, wallet, etc."⁵⁹ And Joseph Picard, reflecting on the experience of his youth, considered it "generally true that people brought up in the open air on their own land will have quite different intrinsic values from those raised within the four walls of rented accommodations."⁶⁰ This imagined rural commonality was no doubt reinforced by the fact that many cattle traders also tilled fields and shoveled stalls—"a common work rhythm and the same worries," as Fritz Frank, with the pathos of a world lost, wrote in his unpublished memoir.⁶¹

But it is not only in memoirs, with their obvious problems as a historical source, that we find such sentiments. Writing in 1890 in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, Dr. Isaak Rülff, the son of a cattle trader in Kirchenhain in the Electorate of Hesse, also talked about the "friendships that get passed on from father to son," despite what obviously separated the Christian peasant from the Jewish trader in the rural areas of Hesse. Rülff conceded that while there were a few "new" capitalists among the Jewish traders in the village, their way of doing business had hardly taken hold. Instead, Rülff emphasized old-fashioned ideas of "honesty and integrity," partly as values for themselves, partly as a way of ensuring tactful relations between Christians and Jews.⁶²

Anti-Semitic polemicists, as we have seen, tended to argue the reverse: that rural Jews and rural Christians had radically different ideas about economy, about fair dealing, and about what constituted the rules of business. Spokesmen from the Agrarian League to the Catholic Center, and writers of popular literature from Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl to Alban Stolz considered Jews unscrupulous middlemen, destroyers, not producers of wealth. Looking at the problem from a different direction, scholars of anti-Semitic prejudice have inadvertently perpetuated the idea of the radical otherness of rural Jews in a Christian agrarian economy. Utz Jeggle, for example, argues in his study of Jewish-Christian villages in Württemberg that conflicting ideas about work and value made for

to be more traditional than urban communities actually seems to be more typical of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century than it was for earlier periods." See Lowenstein, "Jüdisches religiöses Leben in deutschen Dörfern," in *Jüdisches Leben auf dem Lande*, ed. Monika Richarz and Reinhard Rürup (Tübingen, 1997), 224. This argument, as Lowenstein himself points out, is subject to a series of regional qualifications. See also Mordechai Breuer, *Jüdische Orthodoxie im Deutschen Reich 1871–1918* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), 48–51.

59. LBI Unpublished Manuscript. Nathan Marx, "Erinnerungen," n.d., 6–7.

60. Picard, "Childhood in the Village," 277.

61. Fritz Frank, "Verschollene Heimat," 42. For the general argument, see especially Breuer, *Jüdische Orthodoxie*, 279–81.

62. *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 19, 20 (1890): 263–66, 273–77. Cited by Jacob Toury, "Antisemitismus auf dem Lande: Der Fall Hessen 1881–1895," in Richarz et al., *Jüdisches Leben auf dem Lande*, 177. On Rülff, see also Peal, *Antisemitism and Rural Transformation in Kurhessen*, 98.

an unbreachable chasm separating Jews and Christians in the countryside.⁶³ More recently, Olaf Blaschke has argued that "in their economic mentality as well, the Catholics could hardly do otherwise than become anti-Semites."⁶⁴ Here the moral signs are reversed, as Christian peasants wax intolerant. And intolerant Christians often were. Typical seemed the complaint of the local administrator in Weikersheim, Württemberg: "They (the Jews) did not want to produce, but only to take away products through a trade which usually resulted in their profit."⁶⁵

But one may query the value of such expressions as a historical source for understanding the language of work and trade in rural Germany. Might they not emphasize the difference in attitudes toward work at the expense of underlying similarities?

First, there had been other ways of talking about this relationship. In 1853, for example, eighty-eight separate rural communities in Württemberg petitioned the state against an ordinance that would have criminalized certain kinds of cattle trading. The language of one such petition, from the community of Stammheim, is instructive. The town council claimed:

Especially for the middle class, to which most of the local farmers belong, the house-to-house trade in cattle, as it has been carried on by the area's Jews since time immemorial, is not only not disadvantageous but [is rather] indispensable . . . The complaints about the buyers being defrauded by Jewish cattle traders are not shared here, as the great majority of the latter consists of esteemed, trustworthy men, who are very much liked by their customers.⁶⁶

One may not claim this position as representative, but it does stake out an alternative rhetoric, suggesting that, at least in the communities, a different, less dichotomous, vocabulary for describing the relationship between Christians and Jews was extant.

Second, few Jewish memoirs even mention differences in the way Christians and Jews perceived economic value, fair play, or work. What historians may need, then, is a theory of difference that can account for what Jews (and perhaps some Christians) felt to be underlying similarities. Here I would suggest that tension between Christians and Jews in the countryside, tension which so often focused on the problem of usury and on the economic role of the cattle trader, resulted not from radically different and competing ideologies about what constituted value, work, and fair business practice. Rather, tension over economic issues took place within a shared consensus about what counted as fair and just economic behavior. Differences within a shared ideology may

63. Utz Jeggle, *Judendörfer in Württemberg* (Tübingen, 1969), 157–69.

64. Blaschke, "Antikapitalismus und Antisemitismus."

65. Quoted in Jeggle, *Judendörfer in Württemberg*, 159.

66. Reinhard Rürup, "Die jüdische Landbevölkerung in den Emanzipationsdebatten," in Richarz et al., *Jüdisches Leben auf dem Lande*, 130–31.

be just as profound and just as ruinous to the social order as differences between ideologies. But in a shared consensus participants have a shared vocabulary about differences, about transgressions, and about the legitimacy of certain thoughts and behavior. Between radically different ideologies no such vocabulary exists.⁶⁷

Usury was the concrete issue that tested the boundaries of consensus. But at the local level there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that it divided Jews among themselves as well as it did Jews from Christians. Among Jews, usury was a community problem, in part because Jews saw it as a source of anti-Semitism. In his account of Jewish life in the village, Werner Cahnman emphasized that "actions on the part of Jews were judged by how they affected the Gentiles, whether they caused *Rishuth*, i.e., whether they evoked anti-Jewish feelings." *Rishuth* might be caused by Jews working on Sundays, by Jews telling a lie to a Gentile, by not giving to a fund-raising effort (even for a church bell), or by not joining the fire brigade.⁶⁸ But usury was a particularly dangerous transgression—within the Jewish community. Elfe Labsch-Benz, whose ethnological reconstruction of Jewish life in the Badenese village of Nonnenweiler is based on oral interviews, shows that where social position was not based on other virtues—such as honesty, modesty, and diligence—wealth was not matched by respect.⁶⁹

But usury was not just despised because it caused *Rishuth*. Rather, it cut to the quick of issues concerning honesty and justice in the rural economy. Consider the case of Oberaula in Hesse. Johanna Brandes recounted the antipathy felt by her father, the local Jewish schoolmaster, for cattle traders whose avarice led them to force peasants into foreclosure.

With a fervent animosity beyond words, my father hated those Jews about whom it was rumored that they had confiscated the house and the property of this or that peasant. And how did he show his hate, his disgust, his contempt? He was never seen with them, except in Synagogue. When they stood there enwrapped in their prayer robes, crouched down together in deep prayer, when they ardently kissed the holy scriptures, he looked at them and said under his breath, "usurer, hypocrite, corrupter."⁷⁰

Tension led to arguments within the community, especially between the schoolmaster, and Maier, an alleged usurer. Only Ida, Maier's wife, prevented personal animosities from further dividing families and the community. Without informing the antagonists, she would send baskets to Brandes's wife and

67. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as Cultural System," in Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 206.

68. See also Emil Schorsch, "Jüdische Frömmigkeit in der deutschen Landgemeinde," *Der Morgen* 6 (1930): 47.

69. Elfe Labsch-Benz, *Die jüdische Gemeinde Nonnenweiler* (Freiburg, 1981), 33–36.

70. Harris, née Brandes, "Fröhliche Kindheit im Dorf," in Richarz, *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland*, 2:163–64.

children (who were of course poorer) full of "coffee and sugar, rice, semolina, flour," and other items, including, for the schoolmaster, "some tobacco and even a bottle of schnapps."⁷¹ The baskets were gifts, which the "father was never to learn about," and were meant to "soften his heart."

Brandes's antipathy toward Maier the usurer was not atypical in the rural world. Samuel Spiro wrote of the "*Güterschlächter*" (those who appropriated, divided up, and resold the land of indebted peasants) in his native village of Schenklengsfeld in Hesse:

Even among the Jews themselves these "*Güterschlächter*" were not held in high esteem, but they had influence in the community by virtue of their wealth, which they acquired by this unclean business. Likewise my father battled against methods tantamount to the expropriation of impoverished peasants; but his efforts failed due to the avarice of the *Güterschlächter*. Nevertheless, the majority of Hesse Jews earned their bread in an honest way, and their relations to the peasants were based on trust.⁷²

The vocabulary of these statements is important. Neither Brandes nor Spiro argued in the language of free market, capitalist value. Peasants were neither reproached for their laziness, nor condemned for their backwardness, nor blamed for their chronic inability to pay debts. In reality, of course, concrete cases often involved both peasant mismanagement and the moneylender's cupidity. But as an unfair business practice, the expropriation of the property of indebted peasants (*Güterschlächtere*i) was considered immoral—hypocrisy according to Brandes, unclean in the eyes of Spiro.⁷³ Both Spiro and Brandes confronted the problem with strategies of isolation: Brandes refused to sit among the usurers in the synagogue, while Spiro argued that the usurers were few, unrepresentative, and different.⁷⁴ "The majority," as Spiro insisted, "earned their bread in an honest way." The language these men employed was thus not radically different from that of Christian critics in the countryside, even if these critics were anti-Semitic.⁷⁵

71. LBI, Unpublished Manuscript. Harris, née Brandes, "Fröhliche Kindheit im Dorf," esp. 68. On the mediating role of women in his home town of Rheinbischofsheim, see also Cahnman, *German Jewry*, 58–59. For the wider picture of female sociability, see Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1991), 127–34.

72. Spiro, "Jugenderinnerungen," in Richarz, *Jüdisches Leben*, 140.

73. See also Werner J. Cahnman, *German Jewry: Its History and Sociology* (Brunswick, N.J., 1989), 51, who remembers Jews who engaged in foreclosing peasant farms as people "who did not always enjoy the most salubrious reputation among Jews or Christians."

74. Harris, née Brandes, "Fröhliche Kindheit im Dorf," in Richarz, *Jüdisches Leben*, 2:163–64. For a parallel strategy in Alsace in the 1820s, see Paula E. Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace: Acculturation and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1991), 141. According to Hyman, the Jewish Consistory urged rabbis to report instances of usury and even recommended denying synagogue honors to Jews who were usurers. In 1844, the rabbinical assembly in Braunschweig also took a public position against any notion that Jews were allowed to charge unfairly high interest in dealings with Christians. See J. Hamburger, *Real-Encyclopädie für Bibel und Talmud*, supplemental vol. 2 to parts 1 and 2 (Leipzig, 1891), 121.

75. This point may be reinforced by considering Jewish responses to the charge, especially

How should the historian explain this set of responses? One approach might be to posit that a kind of cultural hegemony had brought the Jewish minority in the countryside to accept the terms of the dominant ideology. But this would presuppose that a specific language about economic fairness was already the legitimate property of one rural group against another. In the Kaiserreich, this presupposition would have been based on the further assumption, central to the thinking of the educated public across the confessional spectrum, that religion decisively conditioned economic behavior. Countless authors explained the relative backwardness of Germany's Catholics in these terms while, at an altogether different level of reflection, Max Weber tied the rise of the spirit of capitalism to Calvinism. But with respect to Jews, the discussion spilled from religion, and therefore culture, to race, which assumes timeless, innate characteristics irrespective of history and environment. In *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (The Jews and Economic Life), for example, Werner Sombart put forth with pseudoscholarly thoroughness the argument that a "deep parallel existed between innate Jewish peculiarities, Jewish religion, and capitalism."⁷⁶

But consulting theological statements in order to divine the relationship between religious confession and the ethics of business tells us little about practice, and still less about local practices. With regard to ordinary, daily talk, there is no a priori reason to assume that cattle traders and peasants spoke in markedly different vocabularies about issues of economic fairness, and there is some evidence to suggest that rural Christians and rural Jews, when it came to their own ideology of work and trade (as opposed to what they thought of each other) talked, literally and figuratively, in a common language.

One should not romanticize this language: it was rough, ready, and coarse. When Christian peasants and Jewish cattle traders bargained in the market place, they cast aspersions and mutual insults. At the cattle markets in Fulda and Hersfeld, according to Samuel Spiro, "one could witness the adroitness of Jewish cattle traders and the cunning and stubbornness of the peasants. Curses that were not meant seriously, oaths which were never kept, flew in all directions."⁷⁷ This was the accepted and practiced language of business. When a peasant was given a bum steer, he might reply with his own version of Yiddish expletives: "I'll croak on this spot and my ass will go to pot before I deal with you again (Ich will gleich verrecke ufm Platz und mein Toches soll zuerst Kappore gehn,

responses by those closer to the rural world. See, for example, F. X. Helmdörffer, *Politik und Wucher der Juden: Zu den Schriften Wilhelm Marrs* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1879). Helmdörffer, a south German Jew, took issue with the anti-Semitic writings of Wilhelm Marr by arguing that the Jewish usurer may constitute a real problem, but Marr, as other anti-Semites, vastly overrated it.

76. Werner Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*, (Munich and Leipzig, 1922), 329. For a recent critical evaluation of Sombart's spurious work, see Avraham Barkai, "Judentum, Juden und Kapitalismus: Ökonomische Vorstellungen von Max Weber und Werner Sombart," *Menora: Jahrbuch für deutsch-jüdische Geschichte* 4 (1994): 25–38.

77. Spiro, "Jugenderinnerungen," in Richarz, *Jüdisches Leben*, 2:140. That peasants also knew a range of German-Yiddish expressions, see Labsch-Benz, *Die jüdische Gemeinde Nonnenweiler*, 52.

wenn ich mit dir noch emol handel)."⁷⁸ Of course, the peasant dealt again.

The dealings, as Elfe Labsch-Benz has argued, assumed the qualities of a ritual that both Christians and Jews knew and understood.⁷⁹ In the large cattle trading centers, like Hersfeld in Hesse, this ritual took place publicly at the marketplace; other times, and usually in smaller villages like Nonnenweier, it occurred in the pub or saloon where Christians and Jews imbibed their beer and wine: the partners traded, drank, toasted, argued, and when the deal was cut clapped loudly so that everyone in the saloon could hear.⁸⁰ The writers for the association for Social Policy deplored this sort of rough, rustic interaction. They saw it as manipulation by another name. Writing for the association, a Hesse Landtag deputy described a trade scene in which the peasant felt "insecure without the help and support of his Jew," who, so the deputy argued, had lulled him to this sense of security.

Neighbors were called over, since everyone wants to take part in a good deal; finally a handshake closes the deal, then the buying of wine . . . brings the whole group together in peace and gaiety after often heated and stormy trading.⁸¹

The deputy, focusing especially on the role of alcohol, saw this as so much Jewish scheming. He was not alone. Writing on the Saarland, E. R. Knebel described trading scenes in the pubs as "wild orgies."

Beer, schnapps, and cigars, naturally of the most imaginably bad quality, are given to everyone there. An ever larger number of people arrive, wanting to have a good time. The women are also not absent; they are the first ones whose reddened faces and glassy eyes betray the effect of drink. The passions are continually fanned.⁸²

Peasants, Knebel assumed, lost themselves in these scenes. But one may ask who—in fact—got lost here, for such descriptions hardly betray a keen perception of what was going on. Rather, they reveal middle-class projections about the insobriety, about the loose morals, and about the capriciousness of the lower classes. In this sense, Knebel's report obfuscated more than illuminated the rural world of Christian peasants and Jewish traders.

78. Spiro, "Jugenderinnerungen," in Richarz, *Jüdisches Leben*, 2:140. Linguists are now beginning to study this lost language more carefully. See Y. Matras, "Sondersprachliche Hebraismen: Zum semantischen Wandel in der herbräischen Komponente der südwestdeutschen Viehhändlersprache," in *Rotwelsch-Dialekte*, ed. Klaus Siewert (Wiesbaden, 1996), 43–58; Dieter Thommen, "Das Jiddische ('Jüdisch-Deutsche') im Surbtal und im Bodenseekreis," in *Landjudentum im Süddeutschen- und Bodenseeraum*, ed. Voarlberg Landesarchiv, 87–91.

79. Labsch-Benz, *Die jüdische Gemeinde Nonnenweier*, 62–63.

80. *Ibid.*, 62.

81. *Der Wucher auf dem Lande*, 78. For a similar complaint from the district of Trier, see *Bäuerliche Zustände*, I, 207.

82. *Ibid.*, 128. On E. R. Knebel and conditions in the Saarland, see David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York, 1994), 83–85.

This rural world was obfuscated in another sense, too. For it is clear that in areas of Christian-Jewish coexistence in the countryside, the rural economy turned on different rhythms. Thus evidence exists that to some extent both Christians and Jews arranged work times around each other's religious calendars. From the remains of recently discovered village artifacts, researchers have found Jewish calendars which, along with the Jewish holidays, also contained handwritten notes on the Christian holidays, including the more important saints' days and information on where the market and the religious services were to be held.⁸³ This kind of cross-cultural, local knowledge could also be found on the other side of the religious divide. There is, for example, evidence of peasants in Jewish-Christian villages who marked the start of early summer sowing and sheared their lambs according to the calendar of the Jewish Sabbaths.⁸⁴ As well, a number of memoirists told stories about cattle traders who left their kosher crockery at Christian inns and with peasants who lived along their routes.⁸⁵ How widespread these practices were, or whether they stopped when the railroad and the telegraph brought more modern ways to the countryside, is difficult to ascertain. But we do know that popular religious authors, like the Catholic almanac writer Alban Stolz, admonished Christians to take the solemn piety of observant Jews in the countryside as an example of true religious devotion.⁸⁶ Likewise, devout Christians in the village especially shunned those Jews about whom it was known that they disregarded the Sabbath.⁸⁷ For our purposes more germane, peasants in Christian-Jewish areas structured their market activities around Jewish holidays. Writing about peasant practices in Württemberg, one author complained that "cattle markets that fall on the days of the Jewish holidays are ordinarily postponed."⁸⁸ Likewise, a Bavarian landowner disdained peasants he heard saying, "I'll not bring my cattle to that market 'cause the Jews have holiday now."⁸⁹

The authors writing for the Association for Social Policy hoped to show that Jews were dispensable to the rural economy. They thus cast the ties that existed

83. Frowald Gil Hüttenmeister, "Die Genisot als Geschichtsquelle," in *Jüdisches Leben auf dem Lande*, 213–14. See also Breuer, *Jüdische Orthodoxie im Deutschen Reich*, 280–81.

84. Mordechai Breuer, "Jüdische Religion und Kultur in den ländlichen Gemeinden 1600–1800," in *Jüdisches Leben auf dem Lande*, 77, citing Hugo Mandelbaum, *Jewish Life in the Village Communities of Southern Germany* (New York, 1985), 47. See also Schwab, *Jewish Rural Communities*, 38.

85. See Cahnman, *German Jewry*, 66, n. 60 for more detail.

86. Stolz, *Armut und Geldsachen*, 49–50. Schwab, *Jewish Rural Communities in Germany*, 39, also suggests evidence "of sermons of more than one priest in Bavarian villages who praised the Jewish population for their family life and their sobriety as an example to his flock."

87. Breuer, *Jüdische Orthodoxie*, 279, who cites a Christian villager as saying "Ich kann de Jude net leide, die den Schabbes net halte" (I can't stand the Jew who doesn't observe Sabbath). For an astute reflection on the degree to which religious life, Jewish and Christian, showed characteristics of convergence in popular religiosity, see also Steven Lowenstein, "Jüdisches religiöses Leben in deutschen Dörfern," in *Jüdisches Leben auf dem Lande*, 219–29.

88. *Der Wücher auf dem Lande*, 55.

89. *Ibid.*, 91–92.

as nothing but a strategy to draw unsuspecting peasants into a web of dependence, spun with the imperceptible allure of *Gemütlichkeit*. Observing relations in the countryside around Paderborn, one author for the Association for Social Policy, the vice president of the Westphalian Peasant League, noted:

Jewish traders have the exceptional talent of making the peasant trustful. One finds in the Paderborn countryside that Jews and peasants almost always talk to each other with the (familiar) "du." The peasant likes it when he can in his Westphalian way address the rich trader with his first name and with "du." The peasant receives his wares, usually a good breakfast, he takes some goods for his wife, and there is no formal bill of sale.⁹⁰

But for this author, the moral signs were reversed, as he, and his often anti-Semitic coauthors, were dismayed by the ties between Christian peasants and Jewish traders, by the wine that was drunk, by the clapping, and by the common discourse of people who, despite their myriad divisions, shared some aspects of a rural world.

How then can historians conceptualize a world at once shared and divided as well as marked by considerable animosity and violence? In his work on *Judendörfer in Württemberg* (Jewish Villages in Württemberg), Utz Jeggle considers a great deal of the shared world, which undoubtedly existed, in terms of "collaboration" and "the ideology of adaptation (*Anpassungs-ideologie*)," while relegating Christian memories of a shared existence to the social necessity of imagined harmony.⁹¹ But might not this shared world be something more than false consciousness?

In fact, it was something more. In the German countryside, relations between Christians and Jews were defined by division, by enmity—Christians toward Jews—and by violence. Yet, they were also characterized by rural commonalities (despite very different occupations), by personal relations of business and trade, and, in some measure, by a shared discourse of what counted as just and fair. Modernizers, in particular the authors of the Association for Social Policy, as well as anti-Semites of a more ordinary kind, deliberately obfuscated this shared world by subsuming trading relations between Christians and Jews under so many diatribes against usury and dishonest trading. This world was not a harmonious world, but it was different, more complex, and richer than the rhetoric of usury ever reflected.

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90. *Bäuerliche Zustände*, 2:20.

91. Jeggle, *Judendörfer in Württemberg*, 314. This, he writes, is a function of false consciousness, not in any way a reflection of a past reality: "Late capitalist society," he argues, "does not know unity, for that reason it must postulate harmony all the more vigorously." Monika Richarz, who does not argue in the same style, nevertheless emphasizes difference. See especially Richarz, "Landjuden—ein bürgerliches Element im Dorf?" in *Idylle oder Aufbruch: Das Dorf im bürgerlichen 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Wolfgang Jacobbeit et al. (Berlin, 1990), esp. 184.